

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-09

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 NEAE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03

H-01 INR-07 L-02 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 RSC-01 PRS-01

SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 SAM-01 IO-10 ACDA-05 AF-06 SAB-01

OMB-01 /090 W

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P 271900Z JAN 75

FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7632

INFO AMEMBASSY MUSCAT PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L LONDON 01231

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1

TAGS: OVIP, PFOR, MU, UK

SUBJECT: RETURN OF SULTAN QABOOS TO MUSCAT; PRESS

GUIDANCE ON TOW MISSILES AND MASIRAH

REF: LONDON 908; MUSCAT 102

1. SULTAN QABOOS WITH SOME OF HIS PARTY EMPLANING LONDON THIS EVENING, JANUARY 27, FOR FLIGHT TO MUSCAT. ASSUME ARRIVAL TOMORROW MORNING. FONMIN ZAWAWI HAS TOLD US HE WILL STAY ON HERE A LITTLE LONGER.

2. MASIRAH USE AND TOW MISSILE STORIES HAVE SUBSIDED HERE. WE LEARNED OF OMANI PRESS RELEASE (QUOTED ACCURATELY IN MUSCAT REFTEL) AFTER IT HAD BEEN DISTRIBUTED LAST WEEK, AND CALLED RICE ASSOCIATES (SULTAN'S PUBLIC RELATIONS CONSULTANTS WHO ACTUALLY PREPARED THE RELEASE) AS WELL AS OMANI EMBASSY CHARGE. WE ASKED RICE WHAT HAD OCCASIONED THE RATHER COMBATIVE LANGUAGE IN WHICH RELEASE WAS COUCHED. HE REPLIED THERE HAD BEEN ALLEGATIONS OF A US BASE ABOUT TO BE ESTABLISHED IN ARABIC BROADCASTS EMANATING FROM PDRY AND ELSEWHERE. EXACT PRESS RELEASE HAD COME IN INSTRUCTIONS FROM MUSCAT. WE ASKED TO BE CONFIDENTIAL

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KEPT INFORMED OF ANY FUTURE RELEASES IF POSSIBLE IN AD-

VANCE. BOTH RICE AND OMANI CHARGE AGREED.

3. FCO ACTING ME DEPARTMENT HEAD CLARK (WHO HAD ALSO LEARNED OF OMANI PRESS RELEASE TOO LATE TO DO ANYTHING ABOUT IT) WAS NOT VERY HAPPY BECAUSE OF ITS RESEMBLANCE TO RECENT OMANI PRESS TREATMENT OF PRESENCE IRANIAN TROOPS. THIS IS ANOTHER CASE WHERE STATEMENT IS LITERALLY TRUE, BUT ITS BROADER IMPLICATIONS MISLEADING. HE AND EMBOFF AGREED, HOWEVER, THAT THERE IS NO USE CRYING OVER SPILT MILK. WE NOTED THIS CASE NOT EXACTLY COMPARABLE TO, OR AS SERIOUS AS, PREVIOUS CASE ANYWAY.

4. FCO STATEMENTS TO PRESS RECOUNTED BY BRITISH EMBOFF IN MUSCAT (PARA 3 MUSCAT REFTEL) ARE ACCORDING TO GUIDANCE REPORTED LONDON'S REFTEL OF JANUARY 21.

5. COMMENT: DELAY IN CONCLUSION OF THIS AFFAIR HAS MEANT NEED TO IMPROVISE PRESS GUIDANCE. THIS HAS BEEN COORDINATED HERE AMONG ZAWAWI, FCO, AND EMBASSY WITH SINGLE EXCEPTION OF PRESS RELEASE EMANATING FROM MUSCAT. WE DO NOT KNOW IN WHAT MANNER THAT MAY HAVE BEEN CLEARED BY SULTAN OR ZAWAWI WHILE THEY WERE WINGING THEIR WAYS AROUND NORTHERN EUROPE LAST WEEK, THOUGH IT IS POSSIBLE EXACT LANGUAGE WAS DEVISED BY SOMEONE IN MUSCAT. WE ASSUME DEPARTMENT'S SUGGESTED PRESS GUIDANCE WILL BE AVAILABLE (FOR COORDINATION WITH BRITISH AND OMANIS) ONCE BRITISH HAVE GIVEN THEIR REPLY (BASED ON OUR ANSWERS TO THEIR TECHNICAL QUESTIONS) LATER THIS WEEK. FOR THE PRESENT, OMANI EMBASSY HERE TELLS US THEY ARE REFERRING ANY NEW PRESS INQUIRERS TO THEIR PREVIOUS STATEMENTS. FCO ALSO HOLDING FIRM.
SPIERS

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: INSTRUCTIONS, TRAVEL REPORTS, MILITARY BASE AGREEMENTS, PRESS RELEASES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 27 JAN 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: johnsorg
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975LONDON01231
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: X1
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750029-0999
From: LONDON
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750118/aaaaapr.k.tel
Line Count: 93
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 75 LONDON 908, 75 MUSCAT 102
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: johnsorg
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 19 JUN 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <19 JUN 2003 by WorrelSW>; APPROVED <04 NOV 2003 by johnsorg>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: RETURN OF SULTAN QABOOS TO MUSCAT; PRESS GUIDANCE ON TOW MISSILES AND MASIRAH
TAGS: OVIP, PFOR, MU, UK, (QABOOS, SULTAN)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006